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Renewing of Friendship

HUGH BLACK



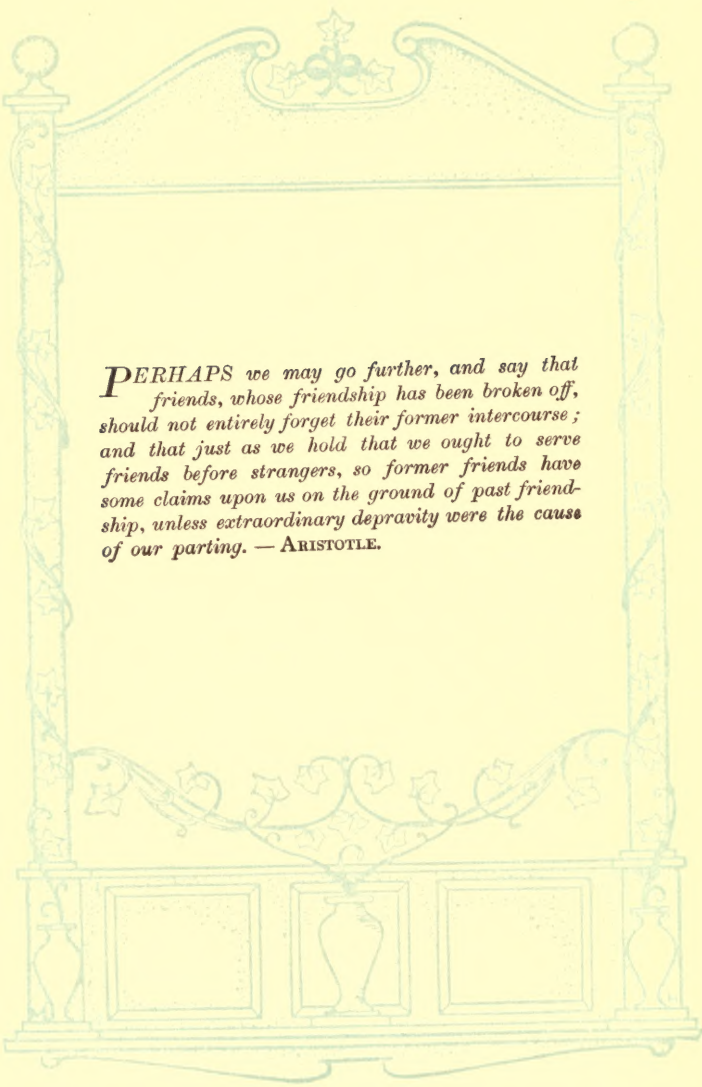
The Friendship Booklets

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*The Renewing of
Friendship*



***P**ERHAPS we may go further, and say that friends, whose friendship has been broken off, should not entirely forget their former intercourse ; and that just as we hold that we ought to serve friends before strangers, so former friends have some claims upon us on the ground of past friendship, unless extraordinary depravity were the cause of our parting. — ARISTOTLE.*

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By

HUGH BLACK

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The Friendship Booklets

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Chapters from "Friendship"

By HUGH BLACK

NEW YORK

CHICAGO

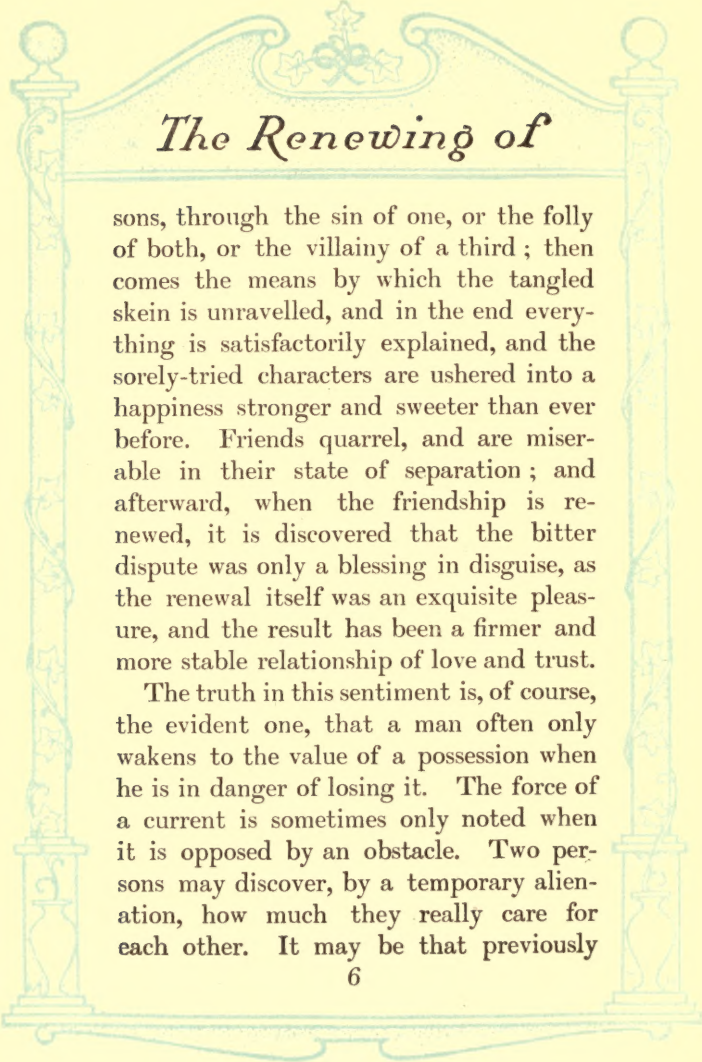
TORONTO

The Renewing of Friendship

IT is a sentiment of the poets and romancers that love is rather helped by quarrels. There must be some truth in it, as we find the idea expressed a hundred times in different forms in literature. We find it among the wisdom of the ancients, and it remains still as one of the conventional properties of the dramatist, and one of the accepted traditions of the novelist. It is expressed in maxim and apothegm, in play and poem. One of our old pre-Elizabethan writers has put it in classic form in English : —

The falling out of faithful friends is the renewing of love.

It is the chief stock-in-trade of the writer of fiction, to depict the misunderstandings which arise between two per-



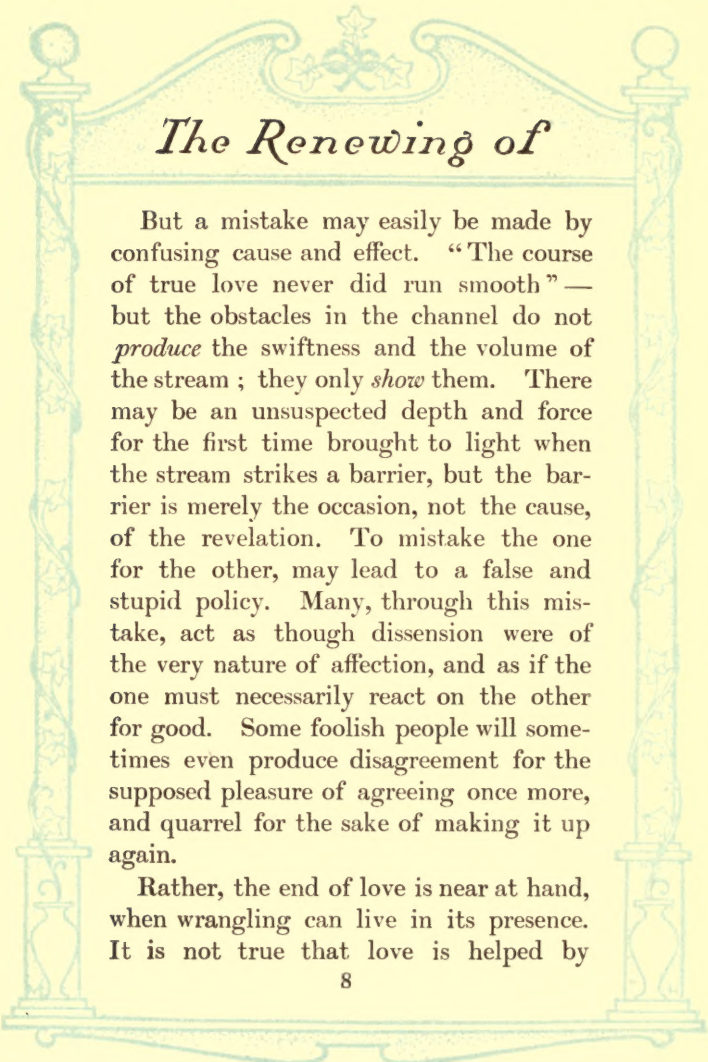
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sons, through the sin of one, or the folly of both, or the villainy of a third ; then comes the means by which the tangled skein is unravelled, and in the end everything is satisfactorily explained, and the sorely-tried characters are ushered into a happiness stronger and sweeter than ever before. Friends quarrel, and are miserable in their state of separation ; and afterward, when the friendship is renewed, it is discovered that the bitter dispute was only a blessing in disguise, as the renewal itself was an exquisite pleasure, and the result has been a firmer and more stable relationship of love and trust.

The truth in this sentiment is, of course, the evident one, that a man often only wakens to the value of a possession when he is in danger of losing it. The force of a current is sometimes only noted when it is opposed by an obstacle. Two persons may discover, by a temporary alienation, how much they really care for each other. It may be that previously

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they took things for granted. Their affection had lost its first glitter, and was accepted as a commonplace. Through some misunderstanding or dispute, they broke off their friendly relationship, feeling sure that they had come to an end of their regard. They could never again be on the same close terms ; hot words had been spoken ; taunts and reproaches had passed ; eyes had flashed fire, and they parted in anger — only to learn that their love for each other was as real and as strong as ever. The very difference revealed the true union of hearts that had existed. They had been blind to the strength of their mutual regard, till it was so painfully brought to their notice. The love is renewed with a more tender sense of its sacredness, and a more profound feeling of its strength. The dissensions only displayed the union ; the discord drove them to a fuller harmony. This is a natural and common experience.



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But a mistake may easily be made by confusing cause and effect. "The course of true love never did run smooth" — but the obstacles in the channel do not *produce* the swiftness and the volume of the stream ; they only *show* them. There may be an unsuspected depth and force for the first time brought to light when the stream strikes a barrier, but the barrier is merely the occasion, not the cause, of the revelation. To mistake the one for the other, may lead to a false and stupid policy. Many, through this mistake, act as though dissension were of the very nature of affection, and as if the one must necessarily react on the other for good. Some foolish people will sometimes even produce disagreement for the supposed pleasure of agreeing once more, and quarrel for the sake of making it up again.

Rather, the end of love is near at hand, when wrangling can live in its presence. It is not true that love is helped by

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quarrels, except in the small sense already indicated. A man may quarrel once too often with his friend, and a brother offended, says the proverb, is harder to be won than a strong city, and such contentions are like the bars of a castle. It is always a dangerous experiment to wilfully test affection, besides being often a cruel one. Disputing is a shock to confidence, and without confidence friendship cannot continue. A state of feud, even though a temporary one, often embitters the life, and leaves its mark on the heart. Desolated homes and lonely lives are witnesses of the folly of any such policy. From the root of bitterness there cannot possibly blossom any of the fair flowers of love. The surface truth of the poets' sentiment we have acknowledged and accounted for, but it is only a surface truth. The best of friends will fall out, and the best of them will renew their friendship, but it is always at a great risk, and sometimes it strains the

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foundations of their esteem for each other to shaking :

And blessings on the falling out
That all the more endears,
When we fall out with those we love
And kiss again with tears !

But in any serious rupture of friendship it can only be a blessing when it means the tears of repentance, and these are often tears of blood. In all renewing there must be an element of repentance, and however great the joy of having regained the old footing, there is the memory of pain, and the presence of regret. To cultivate contention as an art, and to trade upon the supposed benefit of renewing friendship, is a folly which brings its own retribution.

The disputatious person for this reason never makes a good friend. In friendship men look for peace, and concord, and some measure of content. There are enough battles to fight outside, enough jarring

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and jostling in the street, enough disputing in the market-place, enough discord in the workaday world, without having to look for contention in the realm of the inner life also. There, if anywhere, we ask for an end of strife. Friendship is the sanctuary of the heart, and the peace of the sanctuary should brood over it. Its chiefest glory is that the dust and noise of contest are excluded.

It must needs be that offences come. It is not only that the world is full of conflict and controversy, and every man must take his share in the fights of his time. We are born into the battle; we are born for the battle. But apart from the outside strife, from which we cannot separate ourselves, and do not desire to separate ourselves if we are true men, the strange thing is that it looks as if it must needs be that offences come even among brethren. The bitterest disputes in life are among those who are nearest each other in spirit. We do not quarrel

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with the man in the street, the man with whom we have little or no communication. He has not the chance, nor the power, to chafe our soul, and ruffle our temper. If need be, we can afford to despise, or at least to neglect him. It is the man of our own household, near us in life and spirit, who runs the risk of the only serious dissensions with us. The man with whom we have most points of contact presents the greatest number of places where difference can occur. Only from circles that touch each other can a tangent strike off from the same point. A man can only make enemies among his friends. A certain amount of opposition and enmity a man must be prepared for in this world, unless he live a very invertebrate life. Outside opposition cannot embitter, for it cannot touch the soul. But that two who have walked as friends, one in aim and one in heart, perhaps of the same household of faith, should stand face to face with hard brows

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and gleaming eyes, should speak as foes and not as lovers of the same love, is, in spite of the poets and romancers, the bitterest moment of life.

There are some we cannot hurt even if we would; whom all the venom of our nature could not touch, because we mean nothing to them. But there are others in our power, whom we can stab with a word, and these are our brethren, our familiar friends, our comrades at work, our close associates, our fellow laborers in God's vineyard. It is not the crowd that idly jostle us in the street who can hurt us to the quick, but a familiar friend in whom we trusted. He has a means of ingress barred to strangers, and can strike home as no other can. This explains why family quarrels, ruptures in the inner circle, Church disputes, are so bitter. They come so near us. An offended brother is hard to win, because the very closeness of the previous intimacy brings a rankling sense of in-

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justice and the resentment of injured love. An injury from the hand of a friend seems such a wanton thing, and the heart hardens itself with the sense of wrong, and a separation ensues like the bars of a castle.

It must needs be that offences come, but woe unto him by whom they come. The strife-makers find in themselves, in their barren heart and empty life, their own appropriate curse. The blow they strike comes back upon themselves. Worse than the choleric temperament is the peevish, sullen nature. The one usually finds a speedy repentance for his hot and hasty mood; the other is a constant menace to friendship, and acts like a perpetual irritant. Its root is selfishness, and it grows by what it feeds on.

When offences do come, we may indeed use them as opportunities for growth in gracious ways, and thus turn them into blessings on the lives of both. To the offended it may be an occasion for pa-

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tience and forgiveness; to the offender, an occasion for humility and frank confession; and to both, a renewing of love less open to offence in the future. There are some general counsels about the making up of differences, though each case needs special treatment for itself, which will easily be found if once the desire for concord be established. Christ's recipe for a quarrel among brethren is: "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother."

Much of our dissension is due to misunderstanding, which could be put right by a few honest words and a little open dealing. Human beings so often live at cross purposes with each other, when a frank word, or a simple confession of wrong, almost a look or a gesture, would heal the division. Resentment grows through brooding over a fancied slight. Hearts harden themselves in silence, and,

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as time goes on, it becomes more difficult to break through the silence. Often there are strained relations among men, who, at the bottom of their hearts, have sincere respect for each other, and smouldering affection also, which only needs a little coaxing of the spark to burst out again into a dancing flame. There is a terrible waste of human friendship, a waste of power which might be used to bless all our lives, through our sinful separations, our selfish exclusiveness, our resentful pride. We let the sweetest souls we have met die without acknowledging our debt to them. We stand aside in haughty isolation, till the open grave opens our sealed hearts — too late. We let the chance of reconciliation pass till it is irrevocable. Most can remember a tender spot in the past somewhere, a sore place, a time when discord entered with another they loved, and

Each spake words of high disdain
And insult to his heart's best brother.

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And in some cases, as with the friends in Coleridge's great poem, the parting has been eternal, and neither has ever since found another such friend to fill the life with comfort, and free the hollow heart from paining.

There is more evil from such a state of discord than the mere loss it is to both; it influences the whole heart-life, creating sometimes bitterness, sometimes universal suspicion, sometimes cynicism. Hatred is contagious, as love is. They have an effect on the whole character, and are not confined to the single incident which causes the love or the hate. To hate a single one of God's creatures is to harden the heart to some extent against all. Love is the centre of a circle, which broadens out in ever-widening circumference. Dante tells us in *La Vita Nuova* that the effect of his love for Beatrice was to open his heart to all, and to sweeten all his life. He speaks of the surpassing virtue of her very salutation

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to him in the street. "When she appeared in any place, it seemed to me, by the hope of her excellent salutation, that there was no man mine enemy any longer; and such warmth of charity came upon me that most certainly in that moment I would have pardoned whomsoever had done me an injury; and if any one should then have questioned me concerning any matter, I could only have said unto him 'Love,' with a countenance clothed in humbleness." His love bred sweetness in his mind, and took in everything within the blessed sweep of its range. Hatred also is the centre of a circle, which has a baneful effect on the whole life. We cannot have bitterness or resentment in our mind without its coloring every thought and affection. Hate of one will affect our attitude toward all.

If, then, we possess the spirit to be reconciled with an offended or an offending brother, there are some things which may

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be said about the tactics of renewing the broken tie. There is needed a certain tactful considerateness. In all such questions the grace of the act depends as much on the *manner* of it, as on the act itself. The grace of the fairest act may be hurt by a boorish blemish of manner. Many a graceful act is spoiled by a graceless touch, as a generous deed can be ruined by a grudging manner. An air of condescension will destroy the value of the finest charity. There is a forgiveness which is no forgiveness — formal, constrained, from the teeth and lips outward. It does not come as the warm breath which has had contact with the blood of the heart. The highest forgiveness is so full and free, that it is forgetfulness. It is complete as the forgiveness of God.

If there is something in the method of the approach, there is perhaps more in the time of it. It ought to be chosen carefully and considerately ; for it may be

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that the other has not been prepared for the renewal by thought and feeling, as the man who makes the advances has been. No hard and fast rule can be formulated when dealing with such a complex and varied subject as man. So much depends on temper and character. One man taken by surprise reveals his true feeling; another, when taken off his guard, is irritated, and shuts up his heart in a sort of instinctive self-defence. The thoughtfulness of love will suggest the appropriate means, but some emphasis may rightly be given to the phrase in Christ's counsel, "between thee and him alone." Let there be an opportunity for a frank and private conversation. To appeal to an estranged friend before witnesses induces to special pleading, making the witnesses the jury, asking for a verdict on either side; and the result is that both are still convinced they have right on their side, and that they have been wronged.

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If the fault of the estrangement lies with us, the burden of confession should rest upon us also. To go to him with sincere penitence is no more than our duty. Whether the result be successful or not, it will mean a blessing for our own soul. Humility brings its own reward ; for it brings God into the life. Even if we have cause to suspect that the offended brother will not receive us kindly, still such reparation as we can make is at least the gate to reconciliation. It may be too late, but confession will lighten the burden on our own heart. Our brother may be so offended that he is harder to be won than a strong city, but he is far more worth winning ; and even if the effort be unsuccessful, it is better than the cowardice which suffers a bloodless defeat.

If, on the other hand, the fault was not ours, our duty is still clear. It should be even easier to take the initiative in such a case ; for after all it is much easier to forgive than to submit to be forgiven. To

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some natures it is hard to be laid under an obligation, and the generosity of love must be shown by the offended brother. He must show the other his fault gently and generously, not parading his forgiveness like a virtue, but as if the favor were on his side — as it is. Christ made forgiveness the test of spirituality. If we do not know the grace of forgiveness, we do not know how gracious life may be. The highest happiness is not a matter of possessions and material gains, but has its source in a heart at peace; and thus it is that the renewing of friendship has a spiritual result. If we are revengeful, censorious, judging others harshly, always putting the worst construction on a word or an act, uncharitable, unforgiving, we certainly cannot claim kinship with the spirit of the Lord Jesus. St. Paul made the opposite the very test of the spiritual man: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness."

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If we knew all, we would forgive all. If we knew all the facts, the things which produced the petulance, the soreness which caused the irritation, we would be ready to pardon; for we would understand the temptation. If we knew all, our hearts would be full of pitiful love even for those who have wronged us. They have wronged themselves more than they can possibly wrong us; they have wounded a man to their own hurt. To think kindly once more of a separated friend, to soften the heart toward an offending brother, will bring the blessing of the Peace-maker, the blessing of the Reconciler. The way to be sure of acting this part is to pray for him. We cannot remain angry with another, when we pray for him. Offence departs, when prayer comes. The captivity of Job was turned, when he prayed for his friends.

If we stubbornly refuse the renewing of friendship, it is an offence against re-

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ligion also. Only love can fulfil the law of Christ. His is the Gospel of reconciliation, and the greater reconciliation includes the lesser. The friends of Christ must be friends of one another. That ought to be accepted as an axiom. To be reconciled to God carries with it at least a disposition of heart, which makes it easy to be reconciled to men also. We have cause to suspect our religion, if it does not make us gentle, and forbearing, and forgiving; if the love of our Lord does not so flood our hearts as to cleanse them of all bitterness, and spite, and wrath. If a man is nursing anger, if he is letting his mind become a nest of foul passions, malice, and hatred, and evil wishing, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

If we cannot, at need, even humiliate ourselves to win our brother, it is difficult to see where our religion comes in, especially when we think what humiliation Christ suffered, that He might recon-

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cile us to God, and make us friends again with our heavenly Father, and renew our broken love. Whatever be our faith and works, and however correct be our creed and conduct, if we are giving place to anger, if we are stiffening ourselves in strife and disdain, we are none of His, who was meek and lowly of heart. We may come to the Sanctuary with lips full of praises and eyes full of prayers, with devotion in our hearts and gifts in our hand, but God will spurn our worship and despise our gifts. It is not a small matter, this renewing of friendship, but is the root of religion itself, and is well made the very test of spiritual-mindedness. "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." Misunderstandings and estrangements will arise, occasions will come when

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it seems as if not even love and forbearance can avoid a quarrel, but surely Christ has died in vain if His grace cannot save us from the continuance of strife.

Such renewing of love, done with this high motive, will indeed bring an added joy, as the poets have declared. The very pain will give zest to the pleasure. We will take the great gift of friendship with a new sense of its beauty and sacredness. We will walk more softly because of the experience, and more than ever will tremble lest we lose it. For days after the reconciliation, we will go about with the feeling that the benediction of the peace-makers rests on our head and clings round our feet.

But more than any personal joy from the renewed friendship, we will have the smile of God on our life. We will know that we have done what is well pleasing in His sight. Sweeter than the peace which comes from being at one with men,

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is the peace which comes from being at one with God. It settles on the soul like the mist on the mountains, enveloping and enswathing it. It comes to our fevered life as a great calm. Over the broken waters there hovers the golden glory of God's eternal peace.

And more even than all that, we will have gained a new insight into the love of the Father, and into the sacrifice of the Son. We will understand a little more of the mystery of the Love which became poor, which gladly went into the wilderness to seek and to save the lost. The cross will gain new and rich significance to us, and all the world will be an arena in which is enacted the spectacle of God's great love. The world is bathed in the love of God, as it is flooded by the blessed sun. If we are in the light and walk in love, our walk will be with God, and His gentleness will make us great. There is intended an ever fuller education in the meaning, and in the life

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of love, until the assurance reaches us that nothing can separate us from love. Even death, which sunders us from our friends, cannot permanently divide us. In the great Home-coming and Reunion of hearts, all the veils which obscure feeling will be torn down, and we shall know each other better, and shall love each other better.

But every opportunity carries a penalty; every privilege brings with it a warning. If we will not live the life of love, if we harden our heart against a brother offended, we will find in our need even the great and infinite love of God shut against us, harder to be won than a strong city, ribbed and stockaded as the bars of a castle. To the unforgiving there is no forgiveness. To the hard, and relentless, and loveless, there is no love. To the selfish, there is no heaven.

THE WORKS OF HUGH BLACK



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Comfort

Culture and Restraint

Listening to God

Christ's Service of Love

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